

Congress and the Army

When the framers drafted the United States Constitution, they delineated Congress's immense powers in Article I—the power to levy and collect taxes, regulate commerce and banking, coin money and establish post offices, among other things. Congress also has critically important constitutional powers in defense policy: “To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces; To provide for calling forth the Militia. . . . To provide for organizing, arming and disciplining the Militia To raise and support Armies. . . .” Members of Congress take these responsibilities very seriously. Implied in these and other congressional powers is the responsibility to exercise oversight of the executive branch as it carries out the mandates of legislation. Most important though, only Congress can declare war.

This section's articles and panel discussion explain the differing duties and responsibilities Congress and the Army each have. Several authors suggest that civilian officials—including members of Congress—should concern themselves with and make decisions about national strategy, national political objectives and the dedication of national resources to those aims.

*Likewise, the Army's leaders should understand they have a “sphere of influence” too. Their responsibilities include fighting and winning the nation's wars, determining military objectives, drafting and executing plans to achieve them, providing professional education for officers, creating operational and tactical doctrine and overseeing individual and collective training. Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of misunderstanding among Army officers concerning Congress's legitimate role in national security and defense policy. Officers must understand, appreciate and respect Congress's role in civilian control of the military. In his 1964 autobiography, *Reminiscences*, General Douglas MacArthur reflected that “the supremacy of the civil over the military is fundamental to the American system.”*

Because of Congress's role to provide civilian oversight for the military, the importance of two-way communication with Congress, along with a prominent Army presence on Capitol Hill, is vital. To increase congressional understanding of Army programs, the Army needs to spend time and energy establishing relationships with as many members of Congress and their professional staffs as possible. Because of busy schedules, members of Congress must often rely on briefings and advice from their respective staffs. If the Army is to be successful in promoting its programs and policies on the Hill, it is paramount that staffers are fully briefed.

On 19 April 1951, while testifying before Congress, MacArthur remarked: “Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and distinguished members of the Congress: I stand on this rostrum with a sense of deep humility and great pride—humility in the wake of those great architects of our history who have stood here before me, pride in the reflection that this home of legislative debate represents human liberty in the purest form yet devised.”

Commitment by today's congressional and military leaders will assure that the Army's enduring legacy of competent, confident and highly skilled officers continues well into the future.